Unit .04

Session .02

God Redeems Adversity

Scripture

Genesis 39:1-6,19-23; 41:14-16

1 Now Joseph had been taken to Egypt. An Egyptian named Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh and the captain of the guards, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him there. **2** The LORD was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, serving in the household of his Egyptian master. **3** When his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD made everything he did successful, **4** Joseph found favor with his master and became his personal attendant. Potiphar also put him in charge of his household and placed all that he owned under his authority. **5** From the time that he put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house because of Joseph. The LORD's blessing was on all that he owned, in his house and in his fields. **6** He left all that he owned under Joseph's authority; he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate. Now Joseph was well-built and handsome. … **19** When his master heard the story his wife told him—"These are the things your slave did to me"—he was furious **20** and had him thrown into prison, where the king's prisoners were confined. So Joseph was there in prison. **21** But the LORD was with Joseph and extended kindness to him. He granted him favor with the prison warden. **22** The warden put all the prisoners who were in the prison under Joseph's authority, and he was responsible for everything that was done there. **23** The warden did not bother with anything under Joseph's authority, because the LORD was with him, and the LORD made everything that he did successful. … **14** Then Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and they quickly brought him from the dungeon. He shaved, changed his clothes, and went to Pharaoh. **15** Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I have had a dream, and no one can interpret it. But I have heard it said about you that you can hear a dream and interpret it." **16** "I am not able to," Joseph answered Pharaoh. "It is God who will give Pharaoh a favorable answer."

Intro Options

Main Point:
God uses Joseph's circumstances and sufferings to accomplish His plans and purposes.

Option 1

In the previous session, Joseph went from being the favored son of his father to being a slave because of his jealous brothers. Jacob's favoritism fueled hatred, strife, and bitterness in his sons, driving them to plot to rid themselves of their reviled brother. The brothers sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites, who took their new slave to Egypt.

In this session, we will see God set the stage for His plans to come to pass—just not in the way Joseph and his family may have expected. The dreams God gave Joseph would come true: Joseph's brothers would bow down to him (Gen. 37:5-7,9). But first, Joseph would have to endure more adversity. God's act of redemptive reversal was not yet complete. We can be confident that God works providentially in our lives—even through adversity—for His glory and our good.

- **What have you prayed for that God didn't answer the way you hoped?**
- **Looking back, how do you think God was working in that situation to accomplish His purpose?**

Option 2

Place students in groups of 3-4, and give them a stack of index cards. Ask them to list major events in Joseph's life so far, each on a different index card. Examples include: the gift of the multicolored coat from his father, being thrown into the pit, his brothers plotting against him, and being sold to the Ishmaelites. Then, instruct each group to switch cards with another group. After they switch, allow five minutes for the group to prepare a skit that tells the story on their card. Call up groups one at a time to present their skits. Allow the other groups to guess what's going on in the skit. Once someone guesses correctly, ask them to tell the story to the rest of the group. Then ask:

- **Do you think Joseph expected or enjoyed the difficult things that happened to him? Explain.**
- **How would you have responded if any of these things happened to you?**

In this session, we'll see exactly how Joseph responded to adversity in his life and how God was with Him through it all.

His Story

TEACHING PLAN

Joseph was only 17 when his life took a tragic turn: His brothers betrayed him and sold him into slavery. His owners took him to Egypt, far away from his beloved father and his father's people. Joseph's story would continue, and God would use Joseph's adversity.

We cannot forget that Joseph was still a kid, torn from his family and taken to a foreign land. Maybe for the first time in his life, he was alone; a lonely Israelite slave in the house of a powerful Egyptian.

Read Genesis 39:1-6

- **What do you think Joseph thought and felt during his journey to Egypt, especially when Potiphar purchased him? List two things you believe would have been most difficult.**

Joseph may have felt lonely, but he was never alone because God was with Him (39:2). God was with Joseph in Potiphar's house, just as He had been with him on the road to Egypt and in the pit where his brothers had thrown him. Joseph's brothers had betrayed him and cast him away, but God had not.

The Lord was with Joseph and brought him success in Pharaoh's house, which did not go unnoticed by his Egyptian master (39:2-3). Potiphar recognized God was blessing his young servant and that all he did prospered. The shrewd Egyptian placed Joseph in charge of his household and all he owned and the Lord continued to bless Potiphar because of his Israelite slave.

- **When have you felt God's presence in adversity or loneliness?**

Joseph's life appeared to be improving. While he was still a slave in Egypt and separated from his family, God blessed him in his master's house. Joseph became Potiphar's personal assistant and was in charge of his entire household. But Joseph's world was about to be turned upside down.

Scripture says Joseph was well-built and handsome, which did not escape the notice of his master's wife. Potiphar's wife spoke to Joseph day after day, enticing him to have an affair with her but he refused. How could he commit such an evil against Potiphar, and how could he sin against God?

One day, Potiphar's wife was alone with Joseph and she grabbed him by his clothing and told him once more to sleep with her. Joseph broke free and ran from her, but when he ran, she was left holding his garment. Potiphar's wife called for the other servants, showed them Joseph's garment, and accused him of attacking her. Later when Potiphar came home, she showed him the garment and shared the same story.

- **How would you respond if you were falsely accused of something? How do you think Joseph responded?**

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
God uses Joseph's circumstances and sufferings to accomplish His plans and purposes.

Genesis 39

39:2-6. Joseph was away from his people, but he was not away from the God of his people. Undoubtedly Joseph knew and believed the promises God made to his great grandfather, Abraham. He also surely knew Isaac (his grandfather) and Jacob (his father) were sons of that promise. He also knew the promise would continue through one of his father's twelve sons. He knew God was at work, and he knew (from stories Jacob likely told) God often works in unusual ways. God gave children to the childless. God chose the older to serve the younger. God had remained faithful to His covenant promises and blessed Joseph's family even when they doubted and disobeyed.

Knowing these things, Joseph did not waver in his faith. What Joseph had endured, and what he would continue to endure, was difficult. He was not immune to the pains of betrayal and loneliness. But he also knew how God had been kind to his family in the past, and he witnessed God's continued kindness to him even as a slave hundreds of miles from his family. Joseph saw that his loneliness and pain and God's presence and blessing were not mutually exclusive. God was with him and working through him even in the darkness of the moment.

39:19-23. Adversity and injustice were not the only themes in Joseph's life; God's presence and kindness were as well. In yet another dark hour of Joseph's life, God was with Joseph and blessed him. Echoing Potiphar's decision to place Joseph over his house, the warden placed Joseph over everything in the prison, and God made everything Joseph did successful.

Joseph's hope in God did not waver. Even as his circumstances declined, his hope in God did not. Joseph knew the situation he was facing was not good, but his God always is. So, he continued serving God and accepting God's kindness to him and extending it to others.

99 Essential Doctrines *(p. 16, DDG)*

God's Providence

Providence refers to God's continuing work and involvement in His creation. This includes, in various degrees, God's preservation of the created order, His governance, and His care for His people (Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3; Gen. 8:21-22). Christians believe the world, and even the cosmos itself, is contingent upon God, incapable of existing apart from Him. Christians also believe in God's personal and direct intervention in the world—as opposed to a hands-off approach to creation—that affects not only the natural order, but also the individuals and events within human history.

TEACHING PLAN

Read Genesis 39:19-23.

At this point in Joseph's account, we might expect him to lash out, to shake an angry fist at God. But not Joseph. He seemed resilient to the injustices that plagued him. Joseph's circumstances became more difficult, but his faith in God seems to have grown with each difficult situation.

- **What lessons can we learn from Joseph's victory over temptation?**
- **Why is it important to do the right thing, regardless of the outcome?**

At some point, the chief cupbearer and chief baker angered Pharaoh, so he threw them into prison—the very prison Joseph was over. One night, the cupbearer and baker both had dreams that distressed them. Neither could figure out what his dream meant. When Joseph arrived in the morning to tend to them, they shared their dreams with him and he was able to interpret both. The cupbearer's dream meant he would be restored to his role serving Pharaoh in three days. The baker's dream was not as encouraging: he would be executed in three days. Joseph asked the cupbearer to remember him when he was restored to serve Pharaoh. This was just the break he needed. But the final verse in Genesis 40 records what seemed to be the heartbreaking conclusion of this account: The chief cupbearer forgot about Joseph (v. 23).

- **Imagine yourself in Joseph's position. How would you feel if the cupbearer forgot to mention you? How might Joseph's belief in God being there through the good and the bad give comfort and hope during these moments?**

Two years passed. Then one night Pharaoh himself had a dream, no one could interpret. Finally, the cupbearer remembered Joseph. The cupbearer shared the story of his imprisonment and finally told the most powerful man in Egypt about Joseph.

Read Genesis 41:14-16.

Joseph continued to recognize God's presence and power in his life. The cupbearer had forgotten Joseph, but God had not. God interpreted Pharaoh's dream through Joseph. A famine would come upon the land in seven years. Joseph advised Pharaoh to appoint a man to oversee the process of storing up food during the seven years of plenty leading up to the famine. Pharaoh agreed to the plan and, in God's providential act of redemptive reversal, he appointed Joseph as the man to oversee the process. Pharaoh made Joseph the second most powerful man in Egypt. Joseph's journey was complete. The exalted son had become the exalted official by way of being a slave and prisoner.

Activity

For this activity, print out some stereograms in color online (accessible through an internet search). Stereograms are hidden 3D images embedded within another picture. Show students these images, explaining that if you stare at it long enough, the hidden 3D image within it will begin to take shape. Explain that God's hand of providence is similar to these stereograms. His involvement may not be evident on the surface of your circumstances, but through deeper reflection and over the course of time, we can begin to see His plan in working things out for His glory and our good and ultimate joy in Him.

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
God uses Joseph's circumstances and sufferings to accomplish His plans and purposes.

Genesis 41

41:14-16. We learn something else about Joseph from his reply to Pharaoh. Joseph was not about to take credit for what God was doing. He was not going to rob God's glory and seek acclaim for himself—even if that glory and acclaim could lead to his freedom from prison. Ultimately, this moment was not about Joseph; it was about God. So, Joseph trusted God and sought His glory. In response, God gave Joseph what He had given him all along—favor.

Joseph found favor with God and gave God the glory whether he was in the pit or the palace; in chains or on a chair; before Potiphar's wife or jailers; walking along as a slave or riding as the vice-regent of Egypt; in jail or before the king. Likewise believers must stand firm on the Word of God and always seek His glory. We have an advantage Joseph lacked: We have received Jesus Christ as Savior and know the end of the story. "We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28). Consequently, we are to submit to God's plan, even when we cannot understand or see it. We are to believe in the God of the promise even when it is difficult to believe in the promise of God.

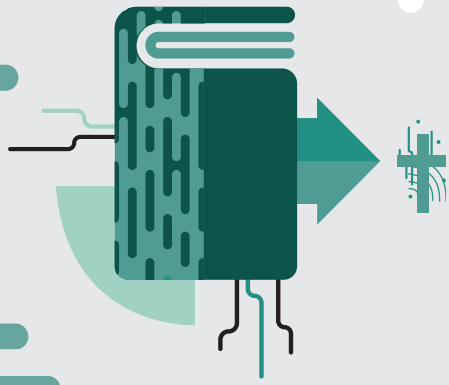
41:46-57. We glimpse the type of life Joseph began living compared to suffering he experienced in previous chapters. Joseph was 30 years old when he came to power in Egypt. He executed his plan to store up extra food in the cities during the seven years of abundance. In an echo of God's promise to bless Abraham's offspring, the text says Joseph stored up grain "like the sand of the sea" (Gen. 41:49).

Not only was Joseph fruitful in his work, he was also fruitful in his family life. He married a woman named Asenath, and she gave birth to two sons. The first son was named *Manasseh* which basically meant *made to forget*. God had made Joseph forget the hardship he had endured at the hands of his family. The second son was named *Ephraim* which basically meant *made fruitful*. God made Joseph fruitful through his affliction. So, not only had God brought Joseph through his hardship, but God produced something in Joseph through his suffering that would not have otherwise been produced.

(p. 18, DDG) Christ Connection

Joseph's life pointed forward to Jesus. Jesus would be betrayed, handed over to captivity, stripped of His robe, and unjustly sentenced to death. But Jesus' rejection and humiliation was God's plan to save Israel and the world. Maybe it looked like God had abandoned Jesus, like His cries to the Father went unanswered, but when the grave opened on Sunday morning, it was clear Jesus was not alone. God vindicated His Son.

We get a glimpse of this plan in Joseph's life. He suffered. It seemed like he was abandoned, but God was with him and accomplishing His good plan. Joseph succeeded even in captivity, and his humiliation would eventually lead to God's exaltation to bless Israel and all nations (Gen. 12; Phil. 2).



GOD REDEEMS ADVERSITY

Genesis 39:1–6, 19–23; 41:14–16

GOD REDEEMS ADVERSITY

God uses Joseph's circumstances and sufferings to accomplish His plans and purposes.

JESUS CONNECTION

Joseph's life pointed forward to Jesus. Like Joseph, Jesus would suffer: He would be betrayed, handed over to captivity, stripped of His robe, unjustly sentenced to death and abandoned. But God was with them: Both were unjustly condemned, but God raised them both to places of honor to accomplish His good plan to bless Israel and all nations (Gen. 12; Phil. 2).

LIFEWISE QUALITY

PERSEVERANCE – Not giving up despite difficulties, failure or opposition.

HEAD

How did Joseph respond to difficult and unfair situations?

How did God use Joseph's circumstances to accomplish His plan?

HEART

Which is easier: continuing to be kind and diligent during difficult circumstances or becoming bitter and giving up? Which did Joseph choose? Explain.

Why do you think God allows you to suffer and go through hard times?

HANDS

The story of Joseph reminds us that God never abandons His people. Write out three specific ways this truth encourages you to persevere in something you are facing this week by completing the following sentence: "Because God never abandons His people, I _____."

Think of a person (or people) in your school or community who is suffering or dealing with difficult circumstances. Find a way to help them persevere. *Examples*: make an encouraging phone call, send a card with a Bible verse, take a bouquet of flowers to someone in the hospital, bake some treats for someone, offer to stay and help a teacher, etc.